

Casino Building
Ravinia Festival
Highland Park
Lake County
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1147

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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. IL-1147

CASINO BUILDING

Location: Ravinia Park Road
Ravinia Festival
Highland Park, Illinois 60035

USGS

Present Owner: Ravinia Festival Association
1575 Oakwood
Highland Park, Illinois 60035

Present Use: Demolished, November, 1985

Significance: The Casino Building was one of the original structures at Ravinia Festival. Ravinia Festival, known previously as Ravinia Park, was an early twentieth century high class amusement park created by the Chicago and Milwaukee Electric Railroad, specifically to attract customers to the railroad.

The original buildings at Ravinia Park were designed by architect Peter Weber in 1902. The Casino was a two story stucco structure, Spanish in feeling with detailing derivative of the Arts and Crafts movement. It was originally used for dining and private parties. There was a ballroom on the second story. In the 1950's it was used as an art gallery for special shows.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1903-1904. Foundations laid in 1903, and actual building began. Ravinia Park opened to the public in 1904.
2. Architect: Peter Weber. Weber was the designing architect for all of the railroad stations in the area, including Highland Park's station for the North Shore Electric Railroad. He laid out and designed all of the Ravinia Park buildings.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The property was purchased for the Chicago and Milwaukee Electric Railroad by A.C. Frost in 1902.

In 1911, a group of North Shore citizens formed the Ravinia Park Company to buy the park from the Railroad. Louis Eckstein contributed \$5,000, Julius Roscnwald contributed \$2,500 and Samuel Insull contributed \$1,000. These were among a large group of donors.

In 1944, Mrs. Louis Eckstein deeded the 36 acre park to the Ravinia Festival Association.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Electrician Oscar Swan laid the underground electric line for the railroad prior to the establishment of the park. When the park was designed, he installed the wiring for the buildings and every summer from 1904 until 1961, except when the park was closed, he served as the electrician for the grounds.
5. Alterations and additions: The interior of the old Casino was partially renovated by the Ravinia Festival Association and opened as an art gallery in 1956.

B. Historical Context:

On August 15, 1904, Ravinia Park opened as a year-round amusement park. Buildings included a casino and ballroom, the Ravinia theatre, a spectator stadium and a music pavilion. Advertised as the highest class amusement park in the West, it had an electric air swing, a skating rink, a toboggan slide and an electric fountain. There was also a baseball field with a grandstand and several restaurants.

In 1910, because of financial difficulties of the railroad, the park was purchased by North Shore residents and the Ravinia Company was formed to promote symphonies and operas.

Ravinia Park enjoyed enormous success until the Depression. The years 1918-1931 became known as "The Golden Age of Opera at Ravinia." Mr. and Mrs. Eckstein, partial owners of the Ravinia Company, kept the park afloat during 1931, but the Depression forced the Park to close four years (1932-1935).

In July of 1936 Ravinia reopened as the Ravinia Festival, an Illinois not-for-profit corporation featuring the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In 1944 Mrs. Eckstein deeded the 36 acre park to the Ravinia Festival Association, stipulating it was only to be used for cultural events and thus assuring its continuance.

In 1955, the Shore Line Route of the Chicago North Shore and Milwaukee Railroad was abandoned and the right of way became the Green Bay Trail. The Chicago and Northwestern Railroad still makes stops at Ravinia Park on concert nights.

Only one of the four original buildings still remains. In 1957 the Ravinia Theatre reopened after 42 years and was partially refurbished; in 1976 it was completely renovated, preserving its original style. It is actively used each season for chamber music and many other kinds of programs.

The world's greatest musicians have played and continue to play at Ravinia. Arthur Rubenstein, Jascha Heifetz, Gregor Pitagorsky, Sir George Solti, Igor Stravinsky, Seiji Ozawa are but a sampling of the artists. In addition, dance troupes including the Joffrey, Merce Cunningham and Martha Graham have performed at Ravinia.

Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The Casino built in 1904, is an impressive example of the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States. It is Spanish in feeling with white stucco and half-timbering.
2. Condition of the fabric: Demolished.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

Berger, Philip, ed. Highland Park: American Suburb at its Best. Highland Parks Landmarks Committee, 1982.

Goldstein, Marsha, ed. Highland Park by Foot or Frame. Highland Parks Landmarks Committee, 1980.

"Multi-Resource Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places." U.S. Department of the Interior, 1982.

Wahlman, James, ed. Highland Park Centennial News 1869-1969. Souvenir Edition. Highland Park News, 1969.

PART FOUR: PROJECT INFORMATION:

This project was undertaken by the Highland park Historic Preservation Commission during the summer of 1985. Funds were made available by the Ravinia Festival Association and the City of Highland Park, Illinois. This Project was executed under the supervision of Susan S. Benjamin, Chairman Highland Park Historic Preservation Commission, Julia Sniderman, Highland Park Historic Preservation Coordinator, and Laura Treishmann. Field measurement was performed by volunteers Peter A. Nicolazzi, II, Historic Preservation Commissioner; Maureen Nicolazzi; Philip

Pagnotta, Jr.; and Highland Park staff members Felice Entratter and Kathleen Dolewski. Project documentation and drawings were prepared by Michael A. Lambert and Jon D. Peterson, Consultants. Photographs were taken by Robert Burnley, Consultant. These drawings were donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey, 1966.